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### **AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:**

The following listing of claims supersedes all prior versions and listings of claims in this application:

1. (Currently Amended) An automated computer-implemented method of processing a digitally coded image in which picture elements are each represented by a ~~colour~~ color value, said method comprising, for each of a plurality of said picture elements, using a programmed computer having a CPU, memory and I/O ports configured to:

(a) ~~performing~~ perform a plurality of comparisons, each comparison comprising comparing a first picture element group of plural pixels, which first group comprises the picture element under consideration and at least one further picture element in the vicinity thereof with a second picture element group of plural pixels, which second group comprises a base picture element and at least one further picture element, the number of picture elements in the second group being the same as the number of picture elements in the first group and the position of ~~the or~~ each further element of the second group relative to the base picture element of the second group being the same as the position of the ~~or~~ a respective further element of the first group relative to the picture element under consideration, wherein each comparison determines whether the two groups match in the sense that they meet a criterion of similarity; and

(b) when at least one comparison results in a match, computing a replacement ~~colour~~ color value for the picture element under consideration, the replacement ~~colour~~ color value being a function of the ~~colour~~ color value for the base picture element of ~~the~~ or each second group for which a match was obtained.

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2. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1 ~~including identifying~~ wherein said programmed computer is used to identify picture elements which meet a criterion of distinctiveness, and computing a replacement ~~colour~~ color value only for picture elements not meeting the distinctiveness criterion.

3. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 2 wherein ~~the step of identifying~~ said programmed computer identifies picture elements which meet a criterion of distinctiveness ~~is performed~~ in advance of step (a), and said comparisons are performed in step (a) only for picture elements not meeting the distinctiveness criterion.

4. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 2 wherein said programmed computer uses as the criterion of distinctiveness for a picture element ~~is that the number of matches obtained for that picture element exceeds~~ which exceed a threshold.

5. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1 wherein the selection of ~~the or~~ each further picture element of the first group is selected in a random or pseudo-random manner.

6. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1 wherein the selection of ~~the or~~ each further picture element of the first group is selected in a random or pseudo-random manner from picture elements lying within a predetermined distance of the element under consideration.

7. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1 wherein the further elements are selected afresh following a match.

8. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1 wherein the selection of the base picture element of the second group is selected in a random or pseudo-random manner.

9. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1 wherein the selection of the base picture element of the second group is selected in a random or pseudo-random manner from picture elements lying within a predetermined distance of the element under consideration.

10. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1 wherein the base picture element for the second group is selected afresh for each comparison.

11. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1 wherein the image is a monochrome image and the ~~colour~~ color value is a single, luminance component.

12. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1 wherein the image is a ~~colour~~ color image and the ~~colour~~ color value has three components.

13. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 11 wherein the match criterion is that no component of any picture element of the first group differs from the corresponding component of the spatially corresponding element of the second group by more than a threshold amount.

14. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1 wherein the replacement ~~colour~~ color value for a pixel is a function also of its existing ~~colour~~ color value.

15. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 14 wherein the replacement ~~colour~~ color value is the average of the ~~colour~~ color value for the picture element under consideration and the ~~colour~~ color value for the base picture element of the or each second group for which a match was obtained.

16. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 14 wherein the replacement ~~colour~~ color value is that one of a predetermined set of ~~colour~~ color values which is closest to the average of the ~~colour~~ color value for the picture element under consideration and the ~~colour~~ color value for the base picture element of the or each second group for a match was obtained.

17. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1 including the step of processing the processed image again.

18. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1 including the step of applying spatial filtering to the processed image.

19. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1 including the step of encoding the processed image using a compression algorithm.

20. (Currently Amended) An image processing apparatus comprising:  
memory means ~~[[ (603) ]]~~ for storing an image; and  
computer means ~~(2, 602) arranged in operation~~ including a programmed computer connected for access to said memory means and memory storing a program configured when executed to perform the ~~[[steps]]~~ method of claim 1.

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21. (Currently Amended) A computer-readable storage medium containing at least one computer program comprising ~~a data carrier having stored thereon~~ a set of instructions ~~for performing~~ which, when executed by a computer system, effect the method of claim 1.